

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 17 July 2003

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **17 July 2003** when there were present:-

Cllr P K Savill (Chairman)
Cllr C A Hungate (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr C I Black
Cllr Mrs R Brown
Cllr K H Hudson

Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr D A Weir

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr T E Goodwin.

SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Mrs M A Starke.

OFFICERS PRESENT

R Crofts	-	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
S Scrutton	-	Head of Planning Services
K Bristow	-	District Manager, Transportation & Operational Services, Essex County Council
S Whitehead	-	Solicitor
J Bostock	-	Principal Committee Administrator

347 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

348 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee received the Schedule relating to Progress on Decisions.

Websters Way Environmental Enhancement (Minute 497/02)

The Head of Planning Services confirmed that the consultation response received from Rayleigh Town Council would be circulated to all Members of the Committee. The response was a public document which would be included in the final Committee report.

Village and Town Centre Regeneration Schemes (Minute 279/03)

Members would be advised which meeting would be attended by the County Portfolio Holder for Transportation, Councillor R Bass, once confirmation was received.

349 ROCHFORD DISTRICT HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2003/04

The Committee received the report of the Area Manager, County Highways on the allocation of funds for the maintenance of highways in the Rochford District Council area for 2003/04, together with the approved special maintenance budget and capital programme.

During the introduction of this item the District Manager indicated that, in view of the tight budgetary position, the surface dressing programme had since been removed from the list of works and that budget transferred over to item 2, Basic Maintenance.

Responding to Member questions, the District Manager advised that:-

- Verge and weed control maintenance is undertaken as part of an annual programme of works. Additionally, any growth considered to cause an immediate hazard would be treated separately.
- A high proportion of basic maintenance is determined from regular inspections as well as being demand led. Priority is given to areas known to be dangerous and an immediate hazard. Ward Members should raise any matter that they consider to be a problem.
- Defect severity is categorised according to national standards which are rigorously specified. Category 1 items are those requiring some form of attention within 24 hours. For example, severely uneven paving slabs likely to cause a trip hazard. It would not be practical to treat the most minor of defects, even with previous funding levels, hence the need to prioritise.
- Budgets were set centrally by the County Portfolio Holder based on a new formula which favoured more rural districts. The Area Office was disappointed at this year's allocation levels for Rochford and had made representations.
- Last year had seen a comprehensive review of winter maintenance and the introduction of a new operational plan. Based on current understanding there had not been a change to the road salting hierarchy, as defined in the Winter Service Operational Plan (WSOP), despite the apparent reduction in the budget for this year. It would be the Area Office's responsibility to ensure the WSOP is adhered to by representations or re-allocations of budgets, rather than there being reserves of salt to rely on.
- The decision to exclude surface dressing works had been made within the last two weeks.
- Resurfacing work at Gardeners Lane, Rayleigh had been undertaken towards the end of the previous financial year. It was understood that

this project had been on the reserve works list. The cost of work could be made available.

During debate a Member commented on the value of ensuring that relevant County Councillors received copies of this type of report, particularly given the significance of the latest poor funding position. Officers confirmed that the current distribution arrangements would first be established.

The Committee agreed a motion, moved by Councillor Mrs R Brown and seconded by Councillor C I Black, on the submission of a letter to the County Portfolio Holder for Transportation about the inadequacy of the winter maintenance budget. It was observed that the only area which had seen increased budgetary provision was public footpaths. Reference was also made to arrangements in other countries where winter tyres were encouraged. In this country, salting was supposed to provide an alternative form of safety.

Resolved

- (1) That the anticipated expenditure on basic maintenance, special maintenance, integrated transport, structural maintenance, other capital works and the surface dressing programme for Rochford District in 2003/04 be noted.
- (2) That a letter be sent to the County Portfolio Holder for Transportation advising that the District is appalled at the inadequacy of the 2003/04 budget for the Winter Maintenance Programme. (CD(F&ES))

350 HULLBRIDGE AND HOCKLEY SHOPPING CENTRE REGENERATION SCHEMES

The Committee received the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) on the costs incurred on the Hullbridge and Hockley shopping centre regeneration schemes, together with funding details.

At the commencement of debate, the Committee endorsed the suggestion of a Member that it would be appropriate for a copy of each priced bill of quantities together with a copy of the relevant payment certificates or accounting document to be made available. This to be for the Hullbridge scheme in the first instance, followed by the other schemes.

Responding to Member questions, the District Manager advised that:-

- All town centre schemes had been based on Contract 2000. This was a new type of partnership based contract between the County Council and Alfred McAlpine. It was purely a plant, labour and materials contract which did not involve bills of quantities or detailed designs. As a contract based on trust, estimates were not as detailed as for other forms of contract. Savings were achieved from there being no up front fees and these are passed on to the client. For a £100,000 scheme these savings could involve a figure of up to £10,000. These up front

savings may be at the expense of an increased risk of variation in final costs as many unknowns would not have been accounted for.

- The County Council was only invoiced for plant, labour and materials. It was understood that billing is based on separate worksheets for each day and time worked by individuals.
- Requests for copies of any paperwork associated with the contract would need to be made to the Area Highways Manager.

During debate reference was made to the potential adverse resource implications which could be associated with the administering of invoices on a daily basis as suggested. It was noted that the District Council had yet to be invoiced for town centre scheme work and would expect full back-up documentation to be provided in support of any invoices. The Committee concurred with the view of a Member that it would be appropriate to raise specific concerns about the financial administration aspects with the County Portfolio Holder for Transportation, Cllr R Bass, when he attends a forthcoming meeting to answer questions relating to Contract 2000. It was agreed that, given the level of concern about contract matters and the Highway Maintenance Programme, there would be value in holding a meeting for the specific purpose of being able to question Councillor Bass. It was also agreed that all Members of the Council, together with the County Members whose Division fell within the Rochford District, should be invited. Officers confirmed that it may be possible to arrange for the next scheduled meeting of the Committee to be held for this purpose. If not, a separate meeting could be convened.

Resolved

That arrangements be made for a meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee to which Councillor R Bass, the County Portfolio Holder for Transportation, is invited to attend and address Members. The meeting to be for the sole purposes of hearing from Councillor Bass. Invitations to be extended to all Members of the Council together with County Members whose Divisions fall within the Rochford District. (CD(F&ES)/HAMS)

351 TOWN MAPS FOR ROCHFORD

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services on options for the provision of town maps for Rochford.

During debate, Members recognised that one aspect of previous discussions about a sign in the Rochford Town Square had been the value of ensuring that it would be in keeping with Conservation Area Status.

Responding to Member questions, the Head of Planning Services advised that:-

- Apart from being double-sided to provide for the inclusion of adverts, the signs proposed by UK Media would be of a similar design to that previously specified.
- The Parish Council and Chamber of Trade could be consulted on whether they would be able to meet the shortfall of £560 associated with the Town Square sign. UK Media could be asked to provide one sign only in Back Lane.

Resolved

That a decision on this matter be held in abeyance pending further information on funding/supply possibilities. (HPS)

352 RAYLEIGH TRAFFIC STUDY SUB-COMMITTEE – UPDATE ON PROGRESS

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services which provided an update on the progress of the work being carried out by the Rayleigh Traffic Study Sub-Committee and sought agreement for an extension to the timetable for the completion of the Sub-Committee's work.

Responding to Member questions, the District Manager advised that no agreement had yet been reached with the County Council on the costing aspect. This would be a matter for discussion by the Sub-Committee.

Resolved

That the Sub-Committee's timeframe for reporting be extended to December 2003. (HPS)

The meeting closed at 8.54 pm.

Chairman _____

Date _____